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HOW SHAKESPEARE SET AND STRUCK THE SCENE FOR *JULIUS CÆSAR* IN 1599

An admiring German, travelling in England in 1599 with credentials that privileged him to see the Queen eat and to dine with the Lord Mayor also then made his respectful bow to the theatres of the English Capital.

“Every day about two o’clock in the afternoon in the city of London, two or three companies of actors in different places make it lively for one another which shall draw the best and have the biggest audience.”

So wrote this German, Dr. Thomas Platter in his diary of his journey recently unearthed by Binz.¹ Dr. Platter himself visited two of these London theatres. Fortunately, he mentions them with particulars enough to identify one of them as Shakespeare’s Globe.

On the 21st of September, he says, he “with his companions was ferried over the water to the straw-thatched house to see the Tragedy of the first Kaiser, Julius Cæsar, acted extremely well with scarcely more than fifteen persons.”

Thanks to this item and to the adventurous research of Dr. Wallace who has made certain the other facts backing such inferences, we can now know that Shakespeare’s noble Roman political play was written in the young maturity of his powers at thirty-five, in the flush of his successful launch into theatre ownership, and during the first year of his promising new partnership in the just-built Globe.

From *Julius Cæsar*, more notably perhaps than from any other one play of this period, may be inferred the strength of his ambition to be the master-hand in the stage managing of his new theatre. In this tragedy his skill in the technique of his own stage challenges attention. Unusual and bulky properties were used in the first three acts. He opens up his drama with a telling bit of stage business prophetic of his plot.

This stage business makes one of his special properties more than picturesque. It makes it useful. Attention is drawn to it conspicuously, and the entire action centering upon it is so shaped

¹ Thomas Platter’s *Reisebericht* quoted by Gustav Binz, “Londoner Theater und Schauspiele im Jahre 1599,” *Anglia*, xxii, 456-464.

as to cut into the heart of the political situation in Rome and bring it home to the audience.

"Certaine Commoners"—his Carpenter, Cobbler, and other mechanics of Rome—enter "over the Stage" to decorate one of Cæsar's "Images" with a ceremonial wreath and "strew flowers" along the path Cæsar was expected to take in his forthcoming Triumphal procession. Obviously the head commoner has just time to put the crown on the statue before the two Tribunes can enter and catch him at it.

They have their suspicions. They enter hard on the heels of those strewing flowers, and come on in the same way,—“over the Stage” after them to berate them for thus honoring Cæsar and strewing flowers in his way. They rapidly catch up with the leader and ply him with questions.

The words “over the Stage” in the first stage direction are the clew to the manner of these lively entrances. But for just these words we must go back to the stage directions of the original producer Will Shakespeare. They have been omitted from the modern text. Yet this descriptive stage direction is precisely what helps,—together with the inferences properly to be drawn from the dialogue as to the right action to go with it,—to make the manner of this first entrance plain. The head commoners—the carpenter and cobbler who “leade” their fellows “about the streets”—are meant to troop on with their companions from the place of their entrance at one side of the rear-stage, out toward the audience and then to wheel over to the opposite side along the front of the closed rear stage. Here the “Image” of Cæsar had been erected.

After the angry Tribunes had driven the herd of commoners away from the “Image,” one of the Tribunes—Flavius, turns back there. He tells the other Tribune to go down towards the capitol on the same side that the commoners had used in making their *exeunt*. “Go you downe that way towards the Capitoll, This way will I.” Obviously he makes for the opposite side where the “Image” stands.

He goes with a gleam of intention in his eye. He makes for it in order to tear off the royally banded coronet that the saucy cobbler had put on it. And he would have his comrade do the like by any other of Cæsar's images he may come across that are so decorated. The other questions their right—“May we do so? You know it is the feast of Lupercall.” Flavius has by this time reached

the place he made for. He flings his answer back over his shoulder. "It is no matter, let no Images be hung with Cæsar's Trophees." Suiting the action to the word, he snatches off the wreath. Having done this, he too turns to go off stage the same way the rest had taken. He lets Flavius know that it is his intention to follow him. "Ile about"—and very much as a boat comes about is descriptive of the requisite action for his course on Shakespeare's stage—"Ile about and drive away the Vulgar from the streets; So do you too &c." Having by this time reached the place where they all made their entrance, he has come where he could toss behind scenes the offending crown wreathed with its suggestive royal band of ribbon. His words match the gesture. "These growing Feathers pluckt from Cæsar's wing, will make him flye an ordinary pitch Who else would . . . keepe us all in servile fearfulnessse."

Casca informs us later that these two Tribunes were put to silence for "pulling Scarffes off Cæsar's Images." Shakespeare takes the trouble to put this information into Casca's talk to tell the audience what came of this action. It completes the incident just enacted and gives it its full meaning. With his usual profound shrewdness as a dramatist and his usual skill as a stage manager he picked out this little episode from his Plutarch as the right thing to start his play with. The dramatic purpose of the first Tribune in returning to the "Image," his action when against his companion's scruples he dares to snatch the crown from Cæsar's head and fling it in the dust, brings out at a stroke by that token better even than his words the intense animus then uppermost in Roman politics. One party was quite ready "to choose Cæsar for their king." The other would brook "Th' eternal Divell to keepe his state in Rome As easily as a King."

Shakespeare obviously intended his third estate to hold both parties in the balance until he was ready to let the "Commoners" dip the scales in the decision of the questions Cæsarism raised. The manner of the entrances "over the Stage" toward Cæsar's "Image" endows that bit of stage business centering on that property with a dramatic relevance not to be spared from the right production of *Julius Cæsar*.

The craft of Cassius in making the noble Brutus a catspaw in the conspiracy against Cæsar is again manœuvred by means of special stage properties and effects.

The action during the conspiracy scene is kept well up stage and in the shade of Brutus's Orchard.² Sudden flares of lightning and rolls of thunder add to the terror of Casca's fright and Cæsar's half-concealed alarm. Ben Jonson's scornful testimony as to the "roll'd drum" and the "nimble squib" that "makes afeard the gentlewomen" is authority enough for Shakespeare's mode of substantiating his repeated stage directions: "Thunder and Lightning" at the start of the scene, "Thunder still" a little later, "Thunder" again as Brutus leaves his orchard to assassinate Cæsar—an appropriately ominous mutter left out by modern editors. "Thunder and Lightning," as Cæsar, suddenly waked by the pother, bursts out of his house early next morning "in his Night-gowne."

In the gloom of the midnight simulated by such contrasts with sudden light, Cassius enters to do what he before said he was going to do "this night." But he would not be seen doing it and while throwing in a scroll at Brutus's window he is so startled by the approach of Casca across stage that he cries out "Who's there?" Nobody knows anybody in the obscurity of this stage midnight save by voice or gait. Only Cicero knew Casca at once. Shakespeare's intentionality in such stage details may be banked on. It is clear that only Cicero was accompanied by a torch-bearer. Cicero's torch-bearer opens the scene literally to make the intended stage night visible. Cicero hails Casca, notices his breathlessness, asks him why he stares so, and Casca has the "limelight on him," so to speak, to show the audience how scared this awful night has made him. Cassius, at Brutus's window, in the midst of his stage business of throwing in his scroll, is startled by Casca's step. So are they both by Cinna until Cassius knows him by his gait. He now gives Cinna the rest of his scrolls and the stage business with them is emphasized. He is to throw one in at the same window, place one in the Prætor's "Chayre" and set up one "in Waxe upon old Brutus's statue."

To the secret effect of this skulking about of the conspirators in the dark is added the obscure picture in the background aloft, of their mysterious movements as they assemble at their rallying place—"Pompeys Porch," in the upper rear stage. In Plutarch,

² For Shakespeare's habitual use of trees on his stage, see "Hamlet as Shakespeare Staged It," in *The Drama*, Aug. and Nov., 1915.

Cassius neither writes the scrolls nor throws them in at the window. Shakespeare, our stage manager, is responsible for all this.

Brutus's "Window" is again the occasion of an effective bit of stage business seeming to be introduced for no other purpose than to make good use of it again with relation to the scrolls and the darkness.

"Enter Brutus in his Orchard." Thus the original stage direction puts it more picturesquely than the modern edited form of it. Leaving his house, represented by the proscenium door opposite to the one by which Cæsar had gone home, the audience sees Brutus come out doors and amid the darkness of the foliage look vainly for the light of any stars to tell the progress of the night. He calls his boy to light a taper in his study. The audience is warned to watch for it when Lucius goes in to kindle it. From inside the window already made noticeable by the stage business of Cassius and Cinna, the little spark of light suddenly shines out. Masterly trifle! The remote touch familiar to every mental association of a lonely watch light at night seen from outside the house is gained. Besides, by means of it what was in that scroll Cinna had just thrown in is to be made clear. The boy who found it where Cinna threw it completes its story by bearing witness that it is the very one. He is "sure it did not lye there" when he went to bed. The nimble squib running on a wire sufficed for the "exhalation whizzing in the ayre" of that tempestuous night by whose light Brutus reads aloud this scroll.

By the time the conspirators knock "within" at the Orchard gate below, and then file through under the trees, muffling their faces "even from darkness," the ominous eventfulness of this stormy night for Cæsar and for Brutus too has convinced the nerves. Joint magic of scenic effects dovetailed in with the dramatic dialogue has wrought the miracle.

Plutarch mentions Brutus's "tribunal (or chair) where he gave audience during the time he was Prætor." But by the cunning of stage producer Shakespeare's scenic economy this chair serves a double purpose. It was the public pulpit later whence both Brutus and Antony addressed the people. This is betrayed by what one of the Plebeians says of Antony: "Let him go up into the publike Chaire." That it was mounted on steps is evident. Nor only from this one passage. "Noble Antony" is repeatedly bidden to "go up" and "come downe." Earlier, when Brutus went to

this same chair announcement was made that "the Noble Brutus is ascended."

It clearly was a massive looking chair, architecturally placed upon a platform built against the rear-stage structure. Its stairway down from the upper-stage balcony and up from the lower floor afforded Cinna, when sent to lay his scroll there, a chance to climb on up to the upper-stage balcony and do just as he was bid: "All this done, Repaire to Pompeyes Porch, where you shall find us." Cassius could have come on stage before, conveniently *en route* to Brutus's "Window," from this same "Porch" where the rest "stay'd for" his return.

The "Statue of old Brutus" to which Cinna also affixed a scroll balanced the "Image" of Cæsar, standing both of them on the ground-floor level flanking the rear-stage front. A tragic anti-thesis!—In itself a monumental presentment of the dramatico-political clash of the plot.

As to Brutus's "Window" there is a striking vestige of evidence imbedded in the dialogue later. It comes in then for a tell-tale mention that gives away the whole arrangement.

Besides the Image, Statue, Chair, and Window on the outer stage, there were set up inside the rear-stage Cæsar's "Seate" of state, the benches the Senators occupied, and the statue of Pompey at whose foot Cæsar was struck down.

After the fall of Cæsar it was Shakespeare's stunt to get the total property lumber on outer and inner stages off. This he forthwith does with vigor and swift picturesqueness, without break in the action and in the eyes of his public. Again he does it by means of unifying his stage business with his dramatic speech and plot-action at exactly the moment of balance the third estate holds in its hands ready to dip either way,—for Brutus and anti-Cæsarism or for Antony and the surviving spirit of Julius Cæsar.

The same speech that turned the scales for Cæsar, the same emotion aroused by Antony in the Plebeians solved also Shakespeare's need as a Stage manager. The Plebeians, driven to mutiny by the creator of Antony's eloquence, at one and the same *coup*, act as his stage hands to strike the scene.

They "plucke downe Benches,"—there go the seats of the Senators! "Formes,"—there go the Chair-platform and steps! They "plucke downe Windowes,"—there goes Brutus's window! Plutarch's corresponding phrase has no "Windowes" in it. Nor any

"Benches." It runs thus: "others plucked up forms, tables and stalls about the Market-place." Shakespeare took this hint. But out of it he used only what suited his peculiar purposes. It suited them to add Windows and Benches. An odd word—"Windowes"—to put in, otherwise!

All this to make a funeral pyre for Cæsar, to turn the course of tragedy at its climax with a "ripping" scenic mob-activity, and yet also clear the way for the bare stage, which the battlefield scenes of the remaining Acts require.

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DID BYRON WRITE *A FARRAGO LIBELLI*?

The English Review for August 1915 reprinted, from the probably unique copy in the possession of the late Bertram Dobell, *A Farrago Libelli. A Poem, Chiefly imitated from the First Satire of Juvenal. Printed for Mr. Hatchard, 1806.* This piece Dobell ascribed to Lord Byron, fourteen pages of commentary being devoted to the support of his theory. The world of letters rests under such a variety of indebtedness to Dobell that any opinion of his must be received with respect; but I think it can be shown, not that Byron did not write the satire (to prove such a negative in the absence of positive identification of the real author being impossible), but that we need other proof than Dobell advanced if we are to accept his contention.

Upon the life of no English poet has there beaten so fierce a light as upon Byron's, Shakespeare's alone excepted. *A priori*, therefore, the likelihood is small that any poem of his should lie *perdu* for a century. The chance is lessened when Byron's temperament is considered; it is hardly conceivable that he would write a satire, print it, and suppress it, without a single reference to it appearing in his letters. Dobell compares the suppression of *Fugitive Pieces* (not *Poems*, as he gives the title); but to that case Byron refers six times in his letters (I, 105, 107, 108, 110, 112, 113) and twice in his poems (I, 114, 247). Only evidence of the most unimpeachable kind could overcome the inherent improbability of Dobell's theory. Does he submit such evidence?

Much stress is laid on a long series of parallels between *A Farrago*